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IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (Currently Amended) A 3D model retrieval method [[of]] for retrieving a 3D model similar to the specified 3D model from a plurality of 3D models stored ~~as objects to be retrieved~~ in a database ~~by using various feature values calculated from the selected 3D model~~, the ~~3D model retrieval~~ method comprising:

displaying a 3D model having a hierarchial structure made of a plurality of subelements corresponding to a unit in human recognition;

specifying a subelement of the 3D model as a retrieval key by allowing a user to designate one of the plurality of subelements displayed, the user being able to change to the level of the hierarchy to which the specification is made with a successive operation ~~at least one of the selected 3D model and a subelement which is a part of the selected 3D model as a retrieval key~~;

acquiring the feature values of the subelements ~~included in the 3D model~~ specified as the retrieval key from the database ~~and data on information about the relationship between the subelements~~;

acquiring the feature values of the subelements ~~included in the 3D models stored as objects to be retrieved in the database and data on information about the relationship between the subelements~~;

calculating the similarity between the subelement specified as the retrieval key and subelements stored as objects to be retrieved in the database by evaluating the differences of ~~3D models to be retrieved and the 3D model acting as the retrieval key using~~ the both of the acquired feature values ~~about the subelements to be retrieved, the acquired data on information about the relationship between the subelements, the acquired feature values~~

~~about the subelements of the retrieval key, and the acquired data on information about the relationship between the subelements~~

sorting the results of the calculation of the similarity; and

displaying a 3D model retrieved based on the result of the sorting ~~retrieval on the basis of the calculated similarity~~.

2. (Currently Amended) The 3D model retrieval method according to claim 1, wherein the hierarchial structure ~~subelements~~ of the 3D model is a tree structure ~~are structured and~~

~~information on the structuring is the data on the relationship~~.

3. (Cancelled)

4. (Currently Amended) The 3D model retrieval method according to claim 2, wherein ~~the specifying as a retrieval key includes specifying each of the subelements at~~ the lowest level of the hierarchial structure of the 3D model is selected when the user first designates one of the plurality of subelements displayed ~~among the selected subelements as a retrieval key~~.

5. (Cancelled)

6. (Currently Amended) The 3D model retrieval method according to claim 1, wherein the 3D model has attribute information corresponding to the subelements of the 3D model, and

the displaying the 3D model ~~result of retrieval~~ includes displaying attribute information corresponding to the subelements of the 3D model at the same time.

7-9. (Cancelled)

10. (Currently Amended) A 3D model retrieval system ~~which retrieves~~ for retrieving a 3D model ~~similar to the specified 3D model~~ from a plurality of 3D models stored ~~as objects to be retrieved~~ in a database by using various feature values calculated from the selected 3D model, the ~~3D model retrieval~~ system comprising:

a display section adapted to display a 3D model having a hierarchial structure made of a plurality of subelements corresponding to a unit in human recognition;

a specifying section for specifying a subelement of the 3D model as a retrieval key by allowing a user to designate one of the plurality of subelements displayed, the user being able to change to the level of the hierarchy to which the specification is made with a successive operation ~~a catalogue selecting section configured to specify at least one of the selected 3D model and a subelement which is a part of the selected 3D model as a retrieval key~~;

a retrieval key feature values acquisition section configured to acquire the feature values of the subelements ~~included in the 3D model~~ specified as the retrieval key from the database ~~at the catalogue selecting section and data on information about the relationship between the subelements~~;

a retrieval object feature values acquisition section configured to acquire the feature values of the subelements ~~included in the 3D models~~ stored as objects to be retrieved in the database ~~and data on information about the relationship between the subelements~~;

a degree-of-similarity computing section configured to calculate the similarity between the subelement specified as the retrieval key and subelements stored as objects to be retrieved in the database by evaluating the differences of ~~3D models to be retrieved and the~~

~~3D model acting as retrieval key using the feature values about the subelements to be retrieved and data on information about the relationship between the subelements acquired by the retrieval key feature values acquisition section and~~ the both of the acquired feature values ~~about the subelements of the retrieval key and data on information about the relationship between the subelements acquired by the retrieval object feature values acquisition section;~~ ~~and~~

a sorting section for sorting the results of the calculation of the similarity; and

~~a~~ wherein the display section is configured to display the 3D model retrieved based on the result of the sorting ~~retrieval on the basis of the similarity calculated by the degree of similarity computing section~~.

11. (Currently Amended) A 3D model retrieval system ~~which retrieves~~ for retrieving a 3D model ~~similar to the specified 3D model~~ from a plurality of 3D models stored ~~as objects to be retrieved~~ in a database ~~by using various feature values calculated from the selected 3D model~~, the ~~3D model retrieval~~ system comprising:

a display means adapted to display a 3D model having a hierarchial structure made of a plurality of subelements corresponding to a unit in human recognition;

a specifying means for specifying a subelement of the 3D model as a retrieval key by allowing a user to designate one of the plurality of subelements displayed, the user being able to change to the level of the hierarchy to which the specification is made with a successive operation ~~catalogue selecting means for specifying at least one of the selected 3D model and a subelement which is a part of the selected 3D model as a retrieval key~~;

retrieval key feature values acquiring means for acquiring the feature values of the subelements ~~included in the 3D model~~ specified as the retrieval key from the database ~~at~~

~~the catalogue selecting means and data on information about the relationship between the subelements~~;

retrieval object feature values acquiring means for acquiring the feature values of the subelements ~~included in the 3D models~~ stored as objects to be retrieved in the database ~~and data on information about the relationship between the subelements~~;

degree-of-similarity computing means for calculating the similarity between the ~~3D models to be retrieved and the 3D model acting as retrieval key using the feature values about the subelements to be retrieved and data on information about the relationship between~~ the subelements ~~acquired by~~ specified by the retrieval key feature values acquisition means and subelements stored as objects to be retrieved in the database by evaluating the differences of ~~and~~ the both of the acquired feature values ~~about the subelements of the retrieval key and data on information about the relationship between the subelements acquired by the retrieval object feature values acquiring means~~; ~~and~~

a sorting means for sorting the results of the calculation of the similarity; and

wherein the display means ~~for displaying~~ is configured to display the ~~result of retrieval~~ the 3D model retrieved on the result of the sorting ~~basis of the similarity calculated by the degree of similarity computing means~~.